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Fact Sheet

Hunger and Poverty among Older Americans

May 2012



DesignPics

More than 18 percent of the U.S. population is over 60 years old—57.5 million people.¹ As baby boomers age (those born between 1946 and 1964), this number will soar, bringing with it many challenges in a country working to rebound from an economic recession.

Federal safety-net programs have been very successful at keeping rates of hunger and poverty within this age group considerably lower than they could be. In 1966, 28.5 percent of Americans over age 65 lived in poverty.² In 2010, that number was only 9 percent—in large part due to programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.³

Despite the success of these safety-net programs, 5.3 million older Americans struggle to put food on the table⁴ and another 3.5 million live in poverty.⁵ Taking into account current housing and healthcare costs, many more older Americans live in poverty than are presently accounted for.

Poverty among older Americans, 2010	
Actual 2010 poverty rate ⁶	9.0%
Projected 2010 poverty rate (when housing and healthcare costs are accounted for) ⁷	15.9%
Projected 2010 poverty rate (without Social Security) ⁸	27.5%

Food Insecurity, 2010		
	General Population	Older Americans
Households ⁹	14.5% 17.2 million	7.9% 2.3 million
Individuals ¹⁰	16.1% 48.8 million	9.2% 5.3 million

Proper Nutrition is Vital for Older Americans

According to a 2011 American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) report on food insecurity among older adults, food insecurity has serious consequences for Americans over 60. Taking into consideration other known health risks, food-insecure older Americans are still more likely to consume fewer major vitamins in their diets, significantly more likely to be in poor or fair health, and more likely to have physical limitations in completing everyday activities.¹¹

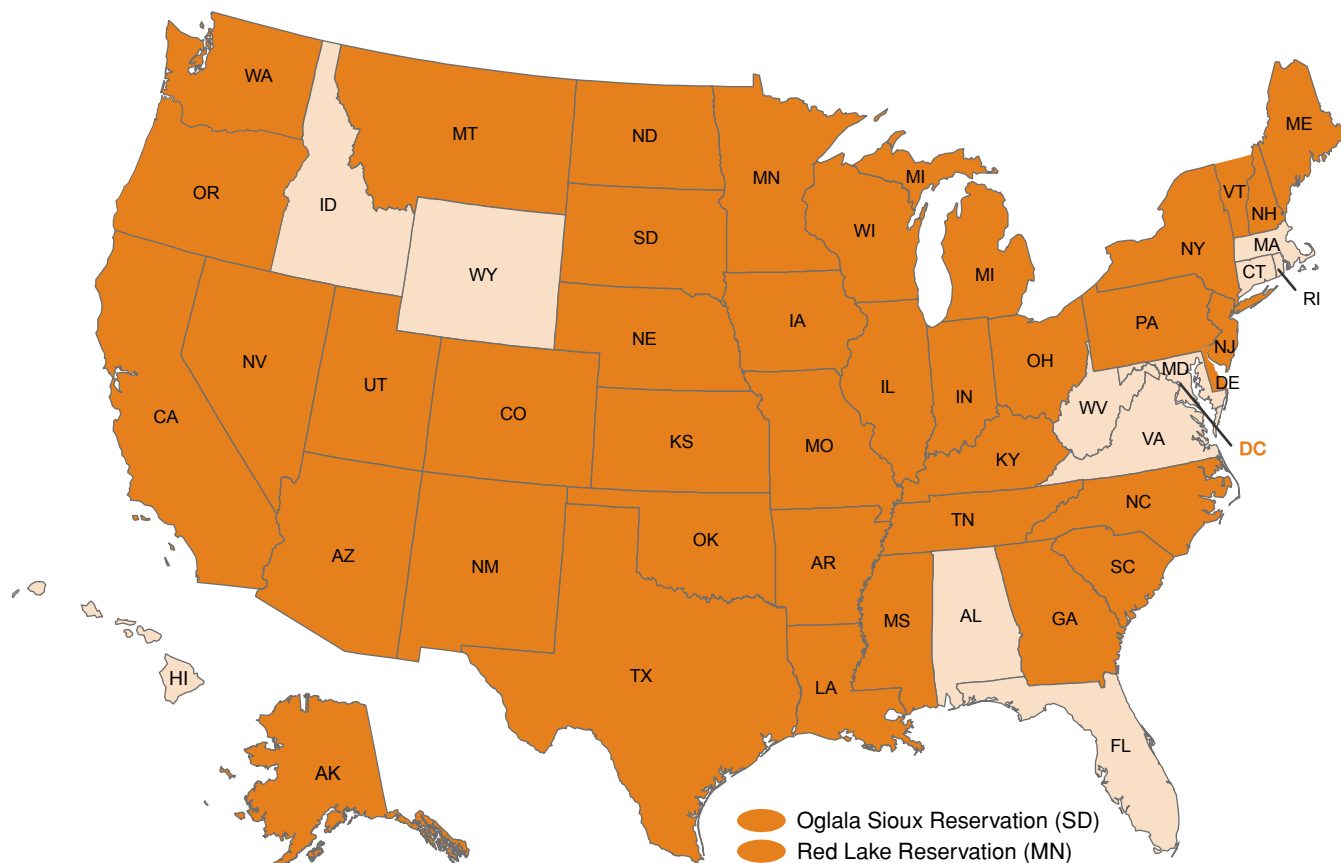
For many older Americans, increasing healthcare costs means a difficult choice between buying medication and buying groceries. Fortunately, programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) are in place to help older Americans make ends meet.

- SNAP supplements the food budgets of the neediest people through a debit-like card that can be used at grocery stores or other authorized locations. SNAP served more than 40 million Americans in 2010. Nearly 3 million were older Americans.¹²
- The CSFP provides monthly food packages designed to supply nutrients typically lacking in the diets of the target population. The program currently operates in 39 states, two Indian tribal organizations, and the District of Columbia. More than 588,000 people participated in CSFP in 2011. 569,000 were older Americans.¹³ See the map on the back of this page.

Unfortunately, only one-third of eligible older Americans participate in SNAP. While CSFP provides nutritious foods typically lacking in older Americans' diets, the program does not currently operate nationwide. These programs are

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39 States Where Commodity Supplemental Food Programs Are Available



Source: 2011 CSFP Participation Data, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

meeting a real need for older Americans but they could be doing more.

The Cost of Cuts to Nutrition Programs

Hunger costs our country an estimated \$167 billion annually in illness, lower educational outcomes, and charitable contributions. Illness costs alone account for \$130 billion of the \$167 billion.¹⁴

Nutrition programs provide a vital lifeline to many struggling older Americans. Congress must create a circle of protection around funding for these programs and ensure eligible Americans over 60 are receiving the nutrition assistance they need.

Endnotes

- ¹ 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table S0101. <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- ² Current Population Survey Historical Tables. Table 3. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html>
- ³ 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table B17024. <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- ⁴ Household Food Security in the United States in 2010 Statistical Supplement.

Table S2. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap/ap057/ap057.pdf>

⁵ 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table S0103. <http://factfinder2.census.gov>

¹¹ Food Insecurity among Older Adults. James P. Ziliak, Ph.D., and Craig Gundersen, Ph.D. AARP Foundation. August 2011. http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/pdf_2011/AARPFoundation_HungerReport_2011.pdf

¹² State Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility and Participation among Elderly Individuals. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. November 2010. <http://ddr.nal.usda.gov/dspace/bitstream/10113/45316/1/CAT31075226.pdf>

¹³ 2011 CSFP Participation Data, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fdpart.htm>

¹⁴ Hunger in America: Suffering We All Pay For. Donald S. Shepard, Elizabeth Setren, and Donna Cooper. Center for American Progress. October 2011. http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/10/pdf/hunger_paper.pdf



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